



## WEEK FIVE – PASSING THE FAITH ALONG

### Read 2 Timothy 2

When we looked at persevering in the gospel, Paul was anxious that Timothy should stay strong, firstly for his own sake. However, being a Christian is not about being selfish. He wanted Timothy to keep himself strong through the grace of Jesus in order to guard the gospel and then to pass it on to others. There were three examples given (*verses 4-9*): that of a soldier on duty who concentrates on carrying out orders, not getting caught up making deals in the marketplace. Then he talks about the athlete who doesn't succeed because he refused to play by the rules. Lastly, it was the diligent farmer who produces the crops, the inference being of one who sees the job through from planting the seed to having produce to sell in the market.

There is a gospel song *Passing the faith along*, which uses the analogy of the relay race. I've used this illustration before, but it portrays exactly what we, as Christians, should be doing.

In the 1991 World Championships, the Great Britain 400-meter relay team had got through to the final. Everyone knows, it's not always who has the fastest runners but the team who can execute the race. It's a technical operation and needs a lot of planning, not the least, who do we put on first and then the middle order and finally the runner who would hopefully bring the baton home. It's also important that no one drops the baton which means immediate disqualification.

In this World Championship, Kriss Akabusi (a Christian), had won the bronze medal in his main event which was the 400-meter hurdles. It was decided that the fastest runner, Roger Black, would go first. Derek Redmond (the one whose father helped him over the line in Barcelona), would go second. John Regis, (normally a 200-meter runner would go third and Kriss Akabusi, a hurdler and certainly not the fastest in the group, would go last. I remember it as if it were yesterday. The Americans had the world 400-meter champion, Antonio Pettigrew on the anchor leg, but our gamble paid off and Kriss came home first with the baton.

On paper, the Americans should have, and were expected, to win but there is something about a guy when he has the baton in his hand, especially the Brits, which makes a difference. **YOU ARE NOT DOING IT JUST FOR YOURSELF ANYMORE – EVERYONE IS DEPENDENT ON YOU.** If you'd put Akabusi in a flat race alongside Pettigrew he probably never would have won. But put a baton in his hand, passed on at just the right moment and you have GOLD!

**It's not just about us. If the Christian Church could grasp this, it would be a quite different entity.**

That gospel song I mentioned says this in one of the verses:

*The runner of a relay, finds in his baton  
Purpose for the running and strength to carry on  
We hold within our grasp the faith that makes us strong  
And like the relay runner, we seek to pass it on*

- Do you see yourself as a team player?
- Are you prepared to take the first leg rather than the last? This is the one most people remember.
- One important thing about being in a relay race is that everyone has to play their part. Likewise in the church, it's not just the clergy who pass on God's word, we should be doing it too.

***Read Philipians 3:7-14***

Running in Ancient Greece: There were four types of races at Olympia. The **stadion** was the oldest event of the Games. Runners sprinted for 1 **stade** (192 m.), or the length of the stadium. The other races were a 2-**stade** race (384 m.), and a long-distance run which ranged from 7 to 24 **stades** (1,344 m. to 4,608 m.).

And if these races weren't enough, the Greeks had one particularly gruelling event which we lack. There was also a 2 to 4-**stade** (384 m. to 768 m.) race by athletes in armour. This race was especially useful in building the speed and stamina that Greek men needed during their military service. If we remember that the standard hoplite armour (helmet, shield, and greaves which protected the shins) weighed about 50-60 lbs, it is easy to imagine what such an event must have been like.

When asked if the Ancient Greeks were faster than Usain Bolt, track coach Aaron Ellis says: *"Absolutely not. A modern sprinter like Bolt has things going for him that people in the past just didn't have."*

He cites things like footwear, track surfaces, understanding of nutrition, therapy, and rehabilitation. For example, Bolt will have a nutritionist who monitors every meal and checks him regularly for any vitamin deficiencies. He has access to people who can help him with any athletic injury, from standard muscle soreness to complex knee sprains. And as for sports clothing! Bolt runs in lightweight, water-shedding, aerodynamic clothes designed by Puma, something the ancient Greeks certainly didn't have!

- What are the differences between us and the early Christian Church?
- What is our training regime?

Let's look again at Philippians 3:7-14:

- Do we value knowing Jesus more than anything?
- George Beverly Shea singer at the Billy Graham crusades, regularly sang the song: *"I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, I'd rather be his than have riches untold..."*. God knows your heart and whether or not this is your goal.
- What does verse 9 mean by *'not having a righteousness of my own'*?
- Verse 13 is so important: WE MUST LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND US. Whatever we have done, or not done, is unimportant in that Jesus forgives us and frees us from our past. Don't allow things of the past to hold us back.
- Let's be like the relay runner, keeping hold of the baton and then passing it on at the right time in order to win the prize. Always remember that we are only a part of the 'team'.



**Prayer:**

**Father God, may we prepare ourselves for this race, have the courage to face up to our failures, and to help others to reach the goal of finding you as Lord and Saviour.**

**Amen**